



# DANNON INSTITUTE®

## Nutrition for Health



### CREATING FACULTY STAFF WELLNESS PROGRAMS

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The rising costs of health care present a major problem in contemporary society. Health care costs currently account for almost 18% of the GDP (over \$2.5 trillion) and projections by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services suggest it will increase to over 20% by 2018. Because the majority of health care costs are covered by employers, these cost projections represent a major challenge for nearly all companies and organizations. Health care costs have become increasingly important for school districts dealing with reduced state support and ongoing budget cuts.

Worksite wellness programs are an effective way for organizations, including school districts, to control rising health care costs. The basic goal of most worksite wellness programs is to foster and promote healthy lifestyles that promote health and well-being in employees. As employees begin to adopt healthier lifestyles, their need for health care is reduced and they represent a smaller drain on the health care system. While the reduced health care costs are the major benefit, research has also demonstrated that such programs can enhance productivity, reduce absenteeism and improve morale and retention. Worksite health promotion programs cost money to plan and implement, but research has conclusively documented that programs save companies money. Reviews from published worksite health promotion studies put the typical return on investment (ROI) at four to six dollars per dollar spent.

Years of research in worksite wellness have identified a set of "Best Practices" for program success. Management support is by far the most important determinant of success since it positions the program as a high priority within the worksite environment. School administrators provide vision and leadership and employees will be more likely to participate when worksite wellness is emphasized internally. Other best practices are more procedural in nature. The use of incentives and the creation of a supportive culture and environment are particularly important for generating and maintaining long-term interest and involvement.

A key step in developing effective worksite health promotion programs is to clearly establish the needs and interests of the employees. A formalized health risk appraisal (HRA) tool is an essential component of worksite wellness programs since it provides a way to both promote awareness among employees and supply information about overall health risks and needs in the workforce. The Wellness Council of America ([www.welcoa.org](http://www.welcoa.org)) and other organizations offer quality HRA tools and resources to facilitate wellness programming.

The recent passage of the Health Care Reform Bill will make it easier for many organizations to create and support wellness programming. Several key provisions within the bill directly relate to worksite wellness programs, e.g., grants for worksite programs and targeted reductions in premiums for demonstrated lifestyle change. An ancillary benefit of coordinated wellness programming in schools is that it also creates a supportive environment for promoting healthy lifestyles among students. Wellness programming should not be viewed as an optional frill program for schools but rather as a high priority strategic initiative to improve schools. Promoting wellness in students and staff will create a positive learning environment and contribute to improved budget prospects in the future.

*Dr. Gregory Welk's research focuses on various aspects of physical activity and especially physical activity in youth. In addition to his position at Iowa State University, Dr. Welk also serves as the Scientific Director of the FITNESSGRAM youth fitness program. Developed by the Cooper Institute for Aerobics Research, FITNESSGRAM is a fitness assessment and promotion program used in physical education programs across the United States.*

*Mr. Abramson is Superintendent of Schools for RSU #38 and a former YMCA CEO living and working in Maine.*

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**Got a "minute"**  
*for some important ideas about wellness?!*

#### Best Practices for Worksite Wellness Programs:

- Top administrative support
- Creative incentive programs
- Effective communication
- Supportive culture and environment